

From the Archives: John Haywood Paul and Iva Durham Vennard- Holiness in Education

John Haywood Paul (1877-1967) was a gifted preacher and writer, but he was also an educator and administrator.¹ He taught at Meridian College in Mississippi (1909-1914), Asbury College in Kentucky (1916-1922) and served as a vice-president of Asbury College and then president of Taylor University in Indiana from 1922 to 1931. He went on to become the president of John Fletcher College in Iowa (1933-1936) and then returned to teach at Asbury Theological Seminary (1941-1946). He served on the Seminary's Board of Trustees from 1941 to 1962. He also worked as an editor with Dr. H.C. Morrison on *The Pentecostal Herald*, and then became the associate editor of *The Herald* for 25 years, until his death at 90 years of age. But in looking at his papers in the archives, the correspondence that stands out the most is with Iva Durham Vennard (1871-1945). This remarkable holiness evangelist would become the founder of the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, later Vennard College, which she led from 1910 until her death. The correspondence reveals a close friendship and respect between these two educators, who each influenced higher education in the Holiness Movement in different, but equally important ways.

Iva Durham Vennard became a Methodist at a young age at a revival, and while still a teenager experienced entire sanctification. She attended Wellesley College and then Swarthmore College, but did not complete a degree due to a call to be an evangelist. As an evangelist she sang and preached at revivals, but when she heard about the emerging deaconess movement, which opened many doors for women in Christian service, she trained as a deaconess in the Deaconess Home in Buffalo, New York. She continued on with her work as a deaconess evangelist for a number of years, when in 1902 she founded the Epworth Evangelistic Institute in St. Louis, Missouri to train deaconesses in evangelism.² While fervent in

her holiness and evangelism, Vennard also emphasized humanitarianism. Her deaconesses were trained in nursing and education. They had practical experience working in jails, juvenile courts, individual homes, and in the red-light district of St. Louis. In 1910, Vennard resigned as the principal of Epworth, because the Methodist leaders in St. Louis would no longer permit her to maintain a focus on entire sanctification and holiness in her deaconess work, and wanted the social action part of the work to take precedence.³



John H. Paul (second from the left), with Dr. H.C. Morrison (on his left) and Dr. Andrew Johnson (on his right) with another unidentified man. This picture was taken circa 1920, when Dr. Paul was a young professor at Asbury College. (Image courtesy of Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections.)

In one of the earliest letters in the correspondence from the Asbury Theological Seminary Archives and Special Collections, Vennard writes to Paul, then the vice president of Asbury College with concerns about her lack of a degree. She writes, “Dear Friend and Brother: At the considerable risk of consuming a considerable amount of your time I am writing this

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morning for your advice. I wish to call your attention to the fact that I have no degree, having never completed my college work for a B.A." She goes on to outline her work at Illinois State Normal University, Wellesley, and Swarthmore. She then writes, "It was at this juncture that the Lord called a radical halt. My supreme renunciation struck the depths when I yielded all my plans for higher education. I do not regret my choice for I think I see the providence of it...I might have lost my spiritual vision. But at the time my consecration was so thorough that I put the thought of finishing up and taking my degree entirely out of all my plans and launched wholeheartedly into Evangelism." After detailing her work since that point she concludes the letter, "I shall greatly appreciate any counsel you can give me in regard to this matter, for I begin to see that as the Principal of this Institution a Degree might help us in getting recognition and standing for the work here." Dr. Paul responds positively, suggesting the option that if she wanted to try getting a graduate degree, "I am in a position to write you a letter which would get you a rating as one whose education is equivalent to the A.B. degree."

As Vennard continues this correspondence, she is interested in the possibility Dr. Paul suggests, but she is concerned because such a letter would work at Chicago University, but "I would hesitate to have my name associated with the Divinity Department of Chicago University." She also notes, "I do not wish to take it to Northwestern for the Methodists have opposed me so many years, and the Faculty at Garrett are so prejudiced against our Institute work that it would only be giving them another opportunity to humiliate me by refusing." While the correspondence does not reveal the results of this discussion on her own educational degree, Vennard is frequently referred to as Dr. Vennard and is credited with having a doctor of divinity by Dr. Paul in his obituary.

In 1922, Vennard writes a long letter to Dr. Paul detailing a number of concerns she has for the Chicago Evangelistic Institute and also the vision for a seminary. She closes the letter by commenting, "let me urge again what you and I have both talked of before, and that is that if God wants an orthodox seminary in America at this stage of the Kingdom interests, then Chicago is the logical location for that seminary, and as I see it at present, Bro. Paul, I do not feel that I could possibly undertake this unless you were coming to be its President. If you feel free to assume that responsibility you can count on me for team work to my limit." Paul's response is rather vague, but notes, "I have some data and facts which I am sure you will both

be willing and competent to consider at the right time.” This might be in reference to his taking the position of president of Taylor University in 1922, or to the formation of Asbury Theological Seminary in 1923. Whatever the case, Vennard is full-heartedly behind his work in Taylor in a letter from 1923, “I am standing by Taylor in every way I can,” Vennard wrote, “My opportunities this summer have been in the way of recommending it to students.”

The confidence between the two educators continued in 1924, when Dr. Paul wrote Vennard for help in possibly hiring Robert Stewart, who had resigned as the vice-president of Asbury College. He wrote, “A few weeks ago Dr. Morrison wrote me a long letter giving a systematic list of my faults, some of which were very grievous. I think about all of them originated in his imagination and that I could prove an alibi in every case. Among the number was a conspiracy with you to move the seminary to Chicago. I thanked him for his frankness and wrote an explanation after each item, undertaking to disabuse his mind.” While she could not help him in that particular moment, she later wrote in 1926, “As I have gone through the years I have been studying people and institutions, and have come to the conclusion that both individuals and institutions that are really vital meet a supreme crisis somewhere along the line. It looks to me that this is one of those times of challenge, both for you and for Taylor. But God will surely see you through. I would like to preach to you the sermon you preached to us, based on the Lord’s message to the Philadelphian Church. It was a great comfort to me and my soul has been feeding on it ever since: ‘Because thou hast kept my word and hast not denied my name, I will keep you.’ I am claiming it both for C.E.I. and for Taylor.”



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Dr. John H. Paul taken in 1966 at Asbury Theological Seminary. Dr. Paul served on the Board of Trustees of Asbury Theological Seminary from 1941 to 1962.

Dr. Paul apparently revealed his plans to leave Taylor in 1930 to Vennard before almost anyone else. He wrote, "I am exceedingly tired of administrative duties and would almost any day lay them on the rested shoulders of Dr. Stuart and turn myself into a channel where I could exercise my spiritual gifts if providence should open the way." Vennard replied, "I thoroughly respect Dr. Robert Stuart, and I have no doubt he will make a very fine president, but I cannot refrain from saying that I am happy my own son has had his years at Taylor under your administration. From his early boyhood you have been his ideal in many ways, and he will remember

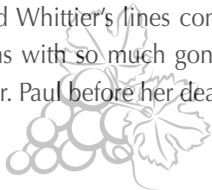
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Taylor with you at the head. I shall keep your confidence and no one will get the information from me first hand.”

In 1931, John H. Paul wrote an appeal to Mr. Jamison who he served with on the Board of Trustees of the Chicago Evangelistic Institute. He wrote, “I am writing you with regard to a matter which has been upon the heart of some of us for several weeks... As you know, Sister Vennard has given the prime of her life to this kind of work for only a nominal allowance; just enough, I may say, to cover her living and current personal expense. After some years of broken health, and with no earning power, Brother Vennard is dead. Their little farm has virtually no value for her support and she is rapidly going over the hill in her physical strength. I am wondering if you could agree with me in the suggestion that the Board vote a life-time allowance of one hundred dollars per month to Mrs. Vennard...”

In a letter from Vennard in 1933, when she is congratulating Dr. Paul on becoming the President of John Fletcher College, it becomes clear that he and his family had been renting an apartment at the Chicago Evangelistic Institute and living there since his time at Taylor. The two had become close colleagues in terms of discussing holiness education and the issues of their various institutions. Paul was also on the Board of Trustees of the Chicago Evangelistic Institute. In a hand written note on her official congratulatory letter, Vennard adds in her own handwriting, “We must keep in touch so that we can continue to compare our ‘sore thumbs.’” In a draft for a response to another letter to Vennard in 1933, Dr. Paul, wrote, “And may I say that the perfect fellowship and trusted friendship that has marked our way in life is of more value then all the professional interests combined.”

The tone of the letters becomes more personal over time. In 1940, Vennard writes to Paul speaking of the death of her longtime secretary, Miss Swartz, when she writes, “Am lost without her, but am trying to pick up the threads and have my work in hand by the time school opens. How many of them I have laid away. Sometimes I feel like a lone tree standing where once a forest had been. And Whittier’s lines come back to me again and again, ‘How strange it seems with so much gone of life and love, to still live on.’” Her final note to Dr. Paul before her death came in 1943 and was handwritten, she writes,



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Dear Brother Paul,

Miss Hibbard brought me your gift and greeting. Thank you so much. The gift was most generous and I shall use it for an extra as you suggested. But much as I appreciate the money and shall enjoy what it brings, the words of loyal friendship meant even more to me.

As the years slip away the old friends tried and true become fewer and more precious.

I feel Brother Paul that I am pulling back to life from the gates of death, but I am encouraged to believe that I am going to be well again and perhaps may have several years more.

They tell me how much everybody enjoyed and was profited by your message at the Convocation. I am so glad. But now, good-bye for now. God bless you and yours,

Faithfully, Iva Durham Vennard



Iva Durham Vennard was a pioneering holiness educator, and Vennard College in Iowa was the continuation of her work at the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, until the school closed in 2008.

John H. Paul responded with a final obituary for his friend and fellow educator published in 1945,

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A beautiful young deaconess with a winsome full-gospel message preached for a mission conference in the far South when I was a 'boy preacher.' Ever since, I along with many mutual friends, have had the privilege to observe her career.

Later I came to Louisville to make my headquarters, and a certain architect named Vennard was in charge of the construction of what was then to be the South's greatest hotel, the Seelbach. I never learned the details of how an eminent spiritual builder became acquainted with a prominent material builder, but the news reached me that my favorite lady preacher was now Mrs. Iva D. Vennard.

I began to watch the career of the two and to admire the self-effacing manner in which the talented Mr. Vennard strengthened the hands of his wife in the educational program to which the Lord had called her, and finally in deep sorrow I shared in laying this man in the grave. That I was out of reach when Sister Vennard was called Home is a regret to me; but the fact that I had one last session with her not many weeks before, in which we shared our memories and hopes, is a sweet recollection.

So far as I know, Mrs. Vennard was the first woman in the United States to be a doctor of divinity. Among this nation's Christian education leaders, none has made a better record in business integrity, in administering consecrated finance entrusted to her, in featuring Christ as an uttermost Saviour, avoiding all tangents and training talent for all fields in kingdom service.⁴

Iva Durham Vennard, besides being an educator and holiness evangelist, was also part of one of the most moving and unusual love stories of her time. She married Thomas Vennard in 1904. They had met in 1901 as Iva Durham was planning the opening of the deaconess school in St. Louis. She did not feel she could give up her call to evangelism, but others wanted her to be solely focused on the school, feeling marriage would get in the way. Thomas Vennard assured her that he would wait for her. Pope-Levison wrote that her interest in Vennard stemmed from this relationship,

I was further hooked when I discovered the love story of her courtship with Thomas Vennard, who wrote a letter in the early 1900s in which he pledge to be her "background of support" if she would marry him. The hook dug even deeper when I read his words, "I may be the janitor of an institution of which you are principal founder and controlling head." His comment turned out to be prophetic. True to his word, Thomas sacrificed his

successful architectural career in the Chicago Loop in order to oversee, at minimal cost, building renovations at her school, the Chicago Evangelistic Institute.⁵

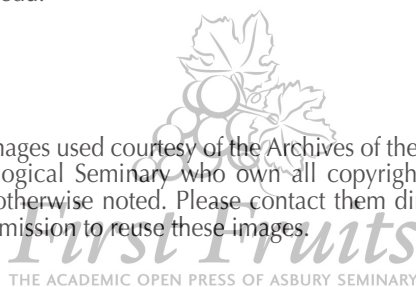
Thus, Iva Durham Vennard was able to continue in ministry with a supportive husband who played a constant background role in the relationship, which was highly exceptional for the time. When Vennard had to resign from the Epworth Evangelistic Institute, Thomas encouraged her to not give up and reaffirmed his desire to stand behind her and support her work.⁶

During the time she was beginning to organize the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, Vennard was also involved in creating the National Holiness Missionary Society as a part of the National Holiness Association. But in 1910, Vennard launched her life's work, the Chicago Evangelistic Institute, a co-educational school focused on evangelism with a solid core rooted in the doctrines of entire sanctification and holiness. Vennard would die on September 12, 1945, leaving behind a solid holiness educational institution, despite the usual types of conflicts and concerns over finances and maintaining support. In 1951 the Chicago Evangelistic Institute moved from Chicago to University Park, Iowa and it was renamed Vennard College in 1959. In November of 2008 the school closed due to declining enrollment and financial difficulties. Yet, Vennard's passion for holiness and the doctrine of entire sanctification clearly stand out in her contributions to education and evangelism.

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly, but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary's mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at archives@asburyseminary.edu.

End Notes

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² For more on the life and ministry of Iva Durham Vennard, cf. "Iva Durham Vennard" in *Turn the Pulpit Loose: Two Centuries of American Women Evangelists*, Priscilla Pope-Levison, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, NY 2004: 178-185.

³ *Alabaster and Spikenard: The Life of Iva Durham Vennard, D.D., Founder of Chicago Evangelistic Institute*, Mary Ella Bowie, Chicago Evangelistic Institute: Chicago, IL 1947:152-153.

⁴ Bowie: 109.

⁵ *Building the Old Time Religion: Women Evangelists in the Progressive Era*, Priscilla Pope-Levison, New York University Press: New York, NY 2014: 174.

⁶ "A Career with a Climax." *Heart and Life Magazine: Memorial Number*. Vol. 32, no. 2 (November 1945): 25.



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